

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

October 2008

Regional controls

Dear Minister – your sums don't add up
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Asbestos danger!

Families as well as firefighters face peril from the deadly mineral
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Where's all the guidance?



LEARNING THE LESSONS
Lobby of Parliament
Wednesday
12 November
Will your branch be represented?



Firefighter deaths: Enough is enough – put safety first



On too many occasions over the past three years I have had to write in this column about another tragedy, another member – or more members – killed in the line of duty. I have seen many of you at the funerals of our colleagues and we have all felt the sense of sadness and loss at such times.

It was because of these tragedies that our annual conference in May unanimously agreed an emergency resolution on firefighter fatalities. This expressed our concern at the rising number of deaths and instructed the Executive Council to initiate research on the subject. That work is now well under way and we expect to be publishing a report in October.

The resolution also called on us to lobby the appropriate bodies to highlight our concerns. As a result we will be lobbying MPs at Westminster on November 12. We are asking all branches to ensure that they are represented.

The article later in this edition (page 10) highlights one of our areas of concern – the current lack of adequate mechanisms to develop and update operational guidance and procedures.

This is an issue which we have raised within the service over the past couple of years. We believe many others are in agreement with us over this and over other similar issues raised by the Fire Brigades Union.

Society expects firefighters to be there in times of need, responding to emergencies,

saving lives. Our research (see page 4) into the number of rescues carried out confirms what an outstanding job our members do – day in and day out. The fact that nobody else is publishing these figures also says something about the thinking among those who set policy within the fire service.

We are proud to carry out that role – that is our profession. But in return we have the right to demand that our members are provided with the best possible equipment, training and resources. We also have the right to demand that the safest possible systems are put in place to provide maximum protection for our members responding to emergencies.

Emergency response is at the heart of our service.

The fire service must properly balance various activities: Prevention – Protection

– Intervention. We are concerned that the balance is currently being lost. The drive to engage in preventive activity – which we have supported throughout – has led some people to forget that the heart of the fire and rescue service lies in *planning for, training for and responding to, emergency incidents*.

The hazards that are involved mean that this central aspect of the firefighting profession cannot be ignored.

Speaking to members from around the country, I understand that many feel that this core role is being forgotten and neglected in the endless drive for change.

I know that an increasing number among chief fire officers are also concerned at



current training regimes and at the danger of losing technical knowledge and expertise.

The simple truth is that we cannot afford to ignore these growing concerns. The job our members do and the hazards that are faced are simply too serious for that. The alarming numbers of firefighter deaths over recent years are a stark

warning of how serious these issues are.

So, once again, I urge every branch to discuss these issues and to read the report we shall publish soon. Most importantly of all, make sure you are represented at the rally and lobby on 12 November in London.

We need to ensure that when

MEMBER BENEFITS

JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Following the appointment of UIA Insurance earlier this year as the FBU's endorsed provider of home, motor and travel insurance, members are advised that as an integral part of UIA's member contact process you may receive some communication from them in the coming months. Please be assured that UIA's underlying principles mean that FBU members can be sure of a consistently fair and honest approach from a company that shares trade union values. All products are easily purchased by telephone on 0845 842 8421 or online via www.fbuinsurance.co.uk

The Fire Minister writes ...

See page 12 for the Minister's letter.

Since the last edition we've also had a number of requests from CLG for copies of the magazine...

→ *Firefighter* welcomes your letters relating to articles published in the magazine. We do not publish letters where an email address only is supplied. Please include full postal address and/or membership number. We may edit letters.

Not getting your own copy of *FireFighter* at home? Make sure you have informed your brigade secretary of any recent change of address.



colleagues are killed at work they are properly remembered and honoured.

One of the best tributes we can make is to ensure that the lessons from such incidents are properly learned and that the entire fire and rescue service takes note and implements the improvements required.

Matt Wrack

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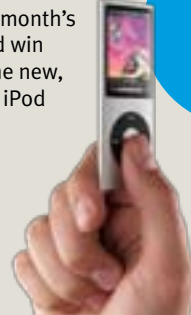
Fire minister responds to FBU revelations about the progress of control regionalisation as new figures show he's got his sums wrong again

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Kathy Thompson was diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma. The likeliest cause was handling the kit of her firefighter husband

PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and win one of the new, updated iPod Nanos



WIN
an iPod Nano
see p22

COVER ILLUSTRATION
MIKEY CARR

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CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



An accident on the M6 motorway earlier this year

Hope, help, rescue and survival

RESCUE

New figures show that more than 300 (322) people a week are being rescued from fires and road vehicle crashes by the fire service across the UK.

Over 83,000 people were rescued – over 25,000 from fires and more than 58,000 from road traffic collisions (RTCs) – across the UK between 2001 and 2005, and over 190,000 since records began in 1990. The overall number of recorded rescues is at or near record levels.

The figures, the most recent and reliable available, are based on answers to parliamentary questions, Freedom of Information Act questions and historical data contained in the official UK fire

statistics.

While many rescues are recorded, central Government does not make the figures public.

And these official figures exclude evacuations, flood and other water rescues and rescues from terrorist incidents. Rescues from RTCs represent an absolute minimum, as they assume for England and Wales that one person only is rescued in every road traffic collision involving persons rescued (the official measure).

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “Everyone in the fire service knows there is terrible human tragedy behind all these incidents. Lives are lost as well as saved and families, friends and communities are left devastated.

“These figures are not a celebration of the work of the fire service. But they do underline that there is hope, help, rescue and survival as well as tragedy and loss.

“It is now very clear that the ‘fire’ service is a critical all-round local emergency rescue service. The figures illustrate why the public has such high confidence in the fire service.

“They also underscore the importance of the frontline rescue capability in saving lives. Politicians searching for a model of a world-class public service need only look at the UK’s fire and rescue service and what we deliver. The answer to that search is under their noses and has a ‘Made in the UK’ label on it.”

→ Visit www.fbu.org.uk (“Rescues” link) for more, including regional/brigade breakdown of the data

'Extremely difficult' nine-hour shifts

FLOODS

Large-scale flooding once again hit Britain in early September with at least eight people killed and some fire services stretched to the limit. The worst hit was Morpeth in Northumberland (right), where 1,000 properties were flooded and 400 residents were evacuated.

At the height of the rescue operation every one of the 23 appliances in the brigade was mobilised, plus two additional appliances and an array of other vehicles.

Some 180 FRS personnel were involved in dealing with the floods on Saturday 6 September, with over 20 personnel being recalled to duty to assist.

Crews were called in from across Northumberland. Some firefighters spent up to nine hours working in the flooded areas to help evacuate residents from the rising waters.

Conditions were extremely difficult with firefighters working waist-deep in flood water that was polluted with sewage and debris.

Colin James, FBU brigade secretary for Northumberland, said Northumberland firefighters and emergency fire control staff did a brilliant job in very trying circumstances. "But events in Northumberland



underline the need for the Government to swiftly implement all the Pitt Review's recommendations relating to the fire and rescue service," he said. "This includes a fully funded national capability for emergency floods response and for the equipment and welfare needs of fire crews to be addressed."

→ Read the FBU's report on the 2007 floods at www.fbu.org.uk

Where the pupils ask the questions ...

NATIONAL SCHOOL

Mention of the word 'school' and thoughts of rows of desks, teacher in front, chalk and writing boards enter the mind. The FBU national 'school' is nothing like that.

Most of the time it's the 'pupils' asking the questions. Last year those in the spotlight included fire minister Parmjit Dhanda MP, Tony Benn and John McDonnell MP.

Conservative councillor Les Byrom was there in his capacity of chair of the employer's side of the National Joint Council. The speakers give you a flavour of the range of political views, although Mr Byrom has since moved his allegiance.

"It was a brilliant and intense week," said Buckinghamshire Brigade Secretary Ricky Mathews who was at last year's school. "It

was a great opportunity to speak to a range of people, including getting an update from Martin Marrion on his pension case."

Robert Moss, Staffordshire agreed. "It was exceptionally wide-ranging and opened my eyes to a number of issues. John McDonnell was articulate, intelligent and deep-thinking and Tony Benn was engaging and hilarious while getting serious points across."

Greg Pawlusek, Bedfordshire, said the school was very enjoyable. "It wasn't like a classroom, we were in groups. It was relaxed and pleasant. We heard from Sarah Messenger from the Local Government Employers. She was animated and open about pay issues. Some of the week was powerful and challenging. I'd advise others to apply."

→ The FBU's National School 2008 takes place at Wortley Hall, Sheffield, 2-7 November.

Sounding off!

ARTHUR LOCKYEAR

Out of Trade Member

Remembrance Sunday

As we approach remembrance Sunday on November 11 and view the prospect of cold winds blowing autumnal leaves around our war memorials and the sight of elderly men and women with their gleaming medals pinned to overcoats, and bright poppy wreaths in their hands, some may ask: "Do we really need to mark events which occurred before most of us were born? Isn't it all now meaningless?" My answer is Yes, we do need to mark Remembrance Sunday, and, No, it is far from meaningless.

The reasons for remembrance are many and varied. Some are born out of the bitter personal experience of those who have served and continue to serve in our armed forces, or those who have lost a loved one to one war or another. There will surely be many a 90-year-old shedding a tear or two not only for his mates of the Second World War, or our young men and women now in Iraq and Afghanistan, but for a father or an uncle lost in the slaughter of 1914-1918.

To forget the extreme violence of war would be as though we were excusing and condoning such a vexation of humanity. And most

To forget the extreme violence of war would be as though we were excusing and condoning such a vexation of humanity

importantly, by not recognising the spiritual and ethical value of remembrance, we as a society risk history repeating itself, and that risk endangers all of us.

Without detracting from the valour of the hundreds of thousands of British subjects who participated in the two world wars, it should also be remembered that a sizeable percentage of the West Indian male population volunteered to serve on "merchant-men" and were among over 50,000 allied and neutral merchant seamen who lost their lives keeping this Atlantic lifeline to Britain intact. Over 1.3 million men from the countries we now know as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh served in the First World War, and 2.5 million in the second. And over 90,000 soldiers from east, west and central Africa took part in the Burma campaign between 1942 and 1945.

Whatever our family lineage, our faith, our beliefs, we all have a stake in remembrance. We all have a debt to honour as a community and to help create a renaissance of remembrance that will become a force for the good of community cohesiveness, respect and service. Will you stand with us on Remembrance Sunday?

→ Arthur Lockyear, a former member of Tyne and Wear FRS, is co-ordinator of the City of Sunderland Remembrance Parade.

Delegates demand action on flooding

TUC

Delegates rallied behind the Union's call for Government to put in place a fully funded national capability for flood rescue with fire and rescue services playing a leading role.

Congress also supported the FBU's demand for urgent action on the lack of adequate equipment and training for responding to incidents on such a scale and the continued lack of adequate preparation one year after the 2007 floods.

General Secretary Matt Wrack (right) paid tribute to fire crews and emergency fire control staff, as well as other emergency workers, and described to delegates the appalling, hazardous conditions they have to work in during major flooding incidents, due to lack of PPE, training and adequate welfare arrangements, calling for the Government to act on the Pitt Review recommendations.

♦ More info www.tuc.org.uk/congress/



Matt Wrack: act on Pitt Review

'End the blockade of Cuba'



Congress supported an FBU motion calling upon the General Council to lobby the UK Government to "end its complicity with the US blockade and move to an independent policy respecting Cuban sovereignty" as well as improve trade and bilateral relations with Cuba. The proposal of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) to next year organise events to celebrate the achievements of 50 years of the Cuban revolution and to provide publicity and support for events organised under the Cuba50 banner was also supported. FBU President Mick Shaw (above) said: "Cuba has many things worth celebrating, such as its exemplary attitude to international aid, sending doctors abroad to help the poorest people in the world."

Concern over plans for strikebreaking

Delegates backed a motion on trade union rights proposed by the RMT and amended by the FBU to express concern that "consideration was given to the use of powers under the Civil Contingencies Act against striking tanker drivers and that the same legislation has been used to justify the planning of privatised strike-breaking in the fire and rescue service under the proposals for Project Fireguard."

Said FBU South West Executive Council member Tam McFarlane: "If chief fire officers engaged with the Union properly then they wouldn't have to worry about strikes in the first place. They should talk partnership to our face instead of planning strike breaking behind our back. And if they have £10 million of taxpayers money to spend they should spend it on better equipment and staff not put it into the pockets of a multinational company."

In brief

♦ The FBU and other unions at the Congress criticised the Government policy of trying to limit public sector pay rises to 2 per cent and agreed to organise days of action including a national demonstration against this pay policy. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said there was "growing anger" among firefighters over pay, especially because of the lack of wage restraint among company executives. FBU Executive Council member for Yorkshire and Humberside, Jerry Pagan, joined calls for the Government to tackle tax avoidance, a move that could help fund public services such as the fire service.

♦ FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack was re-elected to the General Council of the TUC (Section C, consisting of unions of 100,000 members and less) with 411,000 votes. Among the other General Secretaries re-elected to this section was the National Union of Journalists' Jeremy Dear and Brian Caton from the Prison Officers Association. Sadly, Bob Crow, of the RMT transport union, was not elected for the second year running.

♦ An end to anti-abortionists' attacks on women's rights was overwhelmingly backed by delegates. Congress also called for improved access to abortion services, including rights for women in Northern Ireland. FBU Executive Council member Vicky Knight said working class women would bear the brunt of new restrictions on their right to choose being promoted through the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill and called for a "united response" as this issue was a "central trade union issue".

♦ A Trade Union Co-ordinating Group to give the trade union movement "its voice back in parliament" was launched at a fringe meeting, backed by the FBU, PCS and RMT. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said that it was part of the political fightback against the 'neo-liberal' consensus among the three main parties. "People who got into parliament on the back of our movement have dropped us," he said. "We need MPs who are going to stand up for us. This new group is not a drive to disaffiliate unions from Labour, but we are putting them on notice that our members come first."



The Yorkshire town of Ilkley in July 2006 as smoke from large moorland fires that burned for six days rolled down the hills into its centre and surrounding areas

New guidance on wildfires in areas rich in cultural heritage features

GRASSLAND/HEATHLAND FIRES

There are growing concerns about the increase in grassland and heathland fires and its impact on heritage and the environment among politicians across the country and a series of recent announcements aim to tackle the issue.

With latest available official figures* showing grassland and heathland secondary fires hitting a three-year high in England in 2006 of over 65,000 (65,608) – and the second highest level since 1996 – Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears unveiled new guidance to “integrate better protection for historic buildings and the environment into Fire and Rescue Service planning”. She added: “We know that accidental, deliberate and natural fires and water run-off can have devastating effects on lives, the environment and the economy. The guidance will help the Fire and Rescue Service plan with others how to reduce the effects of such incidents making the most of sharing such valuable information, given we have a growing population and a changing climate.”

According to the CLG, “projected climate change highlights the urgency with which fire prevention planning for wildfires should be addressed.” The guidance will help FRS “gather and integrate information to help deal with fire or other emergen-

cies (eg floods or chemical incidents) in sensitive environments and historic sites into their strategic planning,” including the development of “strategies for prevention, protection and operational response.”

Overall, the number of grassland fires in England has been on an upward trend for the past two decades, an issue the FBU has highlighted due to the drain it represents on already stretched fire service resources. North Yorkshire is one area particularly hit with the number of fires increasing by 60% in 2002-2006 compared to the previous five year period. One of the most devastating

‘Fires such as this endanger life, threaten property and wildlife and destroy our beautiful landscape’

fires ever to break out in the North York Moors National Park was the accidental blaze on Fylingdales Moor in September 2003, which raged for six days and destroyed an area of moorland the size of 500 football pitches and involved every fire appliance in North Yorkshire. This will now be the subject of a £26,900 research project, funded by English Heritage, which has pledged as part of the project to produce advice to be used as guidance on disaster planning for

historic moorland sites.

The blaze uncovered a huge concentration of previously unknown archaeological sites dating from the early prehistoric period through to Second World War practice trenches. As well as drawing together all the information gleaned from these sites for interested parties to access and learn from at a later stage, the aim is to “look back at lessons learnt so we can provide advice to others looking to develop counter-disaster proposals for the management of moorland rich in archaeological or cultural heritage features,” according to Graham Lee from the national park authority.

In Wales, Shadow Environment Minister Darren Millar AM, commenting on figures published in August showing a 60% rise in Wales, said they “highlight a worrying increase in the number of grassland fires across the country. Fires such as this endanger life, threaten property and wildlife, and destroy our beautiful landscape.”

Calling for more education to prevent them occurring in the first place, he added: “I am pleased that the number of fires is lower than its high point in 2003 but still concerned that more blazes of this kind have been recorded compared to the start of the decade.”

** Answer to parliamentary questions
14 March 2008 and 30 November 2006*



Dr Martin Luther King speaks to residents at the Robert Taylor Homes on Chicago's South Side in July 1965. The housing project, once considered a model of modern public housing, had become a national symbol of failure

PHOTO: AP/PA PHOTOS

Remembering Martin Luther King

MATT WRACK, FBV GENERAL SECRETARY

“ This year marks the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. He was shot on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on 4 April 1968. Recent commemoration events have been marked on television and radio across the world. We have seen again the famous images from the civil rights movement of the marches for equality and voting rights and the vicious violence with which they were regularly met. We have heard again Martin Luther King’s wonderful speeches, most famously from the 1963 March on Washington. King was without doubt one of the greatest orators of modern times and his words – calling for justice – have the power to inspire people 40 years on.

Since King’s death he has been adopted as a national hero by the US establishment. In the USA a national holiday has been celebrated on his birthday since 1986. Ironically, the law was signed by Ronald Reagan, despite Reagan’s hostility to King and what he stood for. During this process, however, there has also been a drive to omit some of the key features of King’s life and work from the official version of the story.

Martin Luther King rose to national and international prominence following the famous transport boycott in Montgomery Alabama in 1955. This started after Rosa Parks’ heroic refusal to give up her seat for a white passenger. King, a local pastor, rapidly emerged as the leader and organiser of this movement. The transport issue was simply the tip of the iceberg. Across the southern states, black citizens suffered discrimination through the so-called “separate but equal” doctrine which justified and legalised segregation.

During the late 1950s and early 60s, the civil rights movement spread rapidly, campaigning for equal rights, an end to segregation in education and other facilities and for the right to vote in elections. The civil rights movement’s tactics of mass direct action achieved results throughout the south. For example, between 1964 and 1969 the percentage of black adults registered to vote in Alabama increased from 19% to 61%. Hundreds of thousands of people became actively involved and millions more supported the call for an end to segregation. Young people flooded into the movement inspired by the possibility of change.

But King also had a wider vision than simply the need for legal equality. He understood that equality under the law would not automatically end injustice. In 1965 he visited Chicago in the supposedly non-segregated North. He highlighted the conditions facing black people in the cities of the north and pointed that de facto segregation existed despite legal equality.

King also began to see a clear link between the huge economic inequality in America and the position facing African Americans. During the last years of his life he began to develop a very sharp critique of the American system as a whole. Drawing the link between legal equality and economic equality he said:

“What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn’t earn enough money to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee?”

He began to develop plans for a further march on Washington – a Poor People’s March. He intended this campaign to unite poor people from across the racial divide and

The US union AFSCME has various articles and videos on its website about the strike and campaign in Memphis in 1968 and about Martin Luther King’s involvement in the struggle.

www.afscme.org

he spoke of launching a ‘militant’ campaign to force the government to act. In this context he was increasingly seen as a threat by the political establishment. This process escalated as King increasingly denounced the Vietnam War pointing out that the USA could spend billions of dollars fighting a war in Southeast Asia but could not guarantee freedom from hunger or a decent education to its children at home.

The last campaign that King became involved in was in support of a strike by municipal workers in Memphis. The city’s refuse workers were overwhelmingly black and working conditions were appalling. The city authorities refused recognition of the workers’ union – the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Eventually, in February 1968 a strike commenced. It was to last 65 days.

Martin Luther King went to Memphis to give his support. His final speeches were a part of the campaign of support for the strikers. He encouraged mass support by the entire community for the strikers and urged mass attendance at a march in support of the strike.

“If we are going to get equality, if we are going to get adequate wages, we are going to have to struggle for them. And you know what; you may have to escalate your struggle a bit. If they keep refusing and they will not recognize the union ... I tell you what you ought to do and you are together here enough to do it – in a few days you ought to get together and have a general work stoppage in the city of Memphis.”

As King spoke out ever more clearly for a wider vision of justice than simply formal equal rights, the campaign against him escalated. He had been monitored and followed by the FBI for years and ever more hostile press coverage added to the tension. King was also well aware of the numerous death threats which had become a regular feature of his life. On 4 April the threats were fulfilled.

The link forged between the civil rights movement and the trade unions was recognised when AFSCME joined with others in preserving the Lorraine Motel and turning it into the US national civil rights museum. King died fighting for the right of working people to organise in unions. He was a long-term supporter of unions, describing them as the best possible anti-poverty programme. In his campaign against poverty he had also begun to develop a coalition which crossed the racial divisions in American society.

It is ironic that the type of solidarity action King called for in Memphis in 1968 would be unlawful in Britain today. Trade unions have been under attack in both Britain and the USA for the past 30 years. During the same period inequality has grown in both countries despite generally improved living standards. Any possible measure that can be used demonstrates that racial inequality continues to permeate society on both sides of the Atlantic. The work of Martin Luther King is far from over. Trade unions have a key role to play, both here and in the USA, in opposing racism and in fighting for justice for all. If we allow ourselves to be divided we are all made weak. Standing together we are stronger.”

Where's all the guidance gone?

There's a hole in the heart of the fire service and it's risking the safety of firefighters and the public

Fire authorities face ever greater responsibility to respond and plan for emergencies and new threats from climate change to terrorism. An array of accompanying new equipment and training are being rolled out. At a time of unprecedented change and challenges for the fire service, the professional and technical support from central government is more necessary than ever if safe working practices for all firefighters – and the safety of the public they protect – are to be assured.

Yet crucial operational and technical guidance has been thin on the ground. In June last year, following concerns raised by the FBU, Andrew Dismore MP asked the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if she would place in the House of Commons library copies of all valid operational guidance issued to fire and rescue authorities. He was told in a written parliamentary answer (27 June 2007) from the then fire minister Angela Smith that the department was “currently in the process of

reviewing all operational guidance issued to the fire and rescue service” and that would likely “result in the review, re-issue or withdrawal of some of the considerable body of existing guidance” Thus, placing all operational guidance in the Library at that time “would not be a good use of resources.”

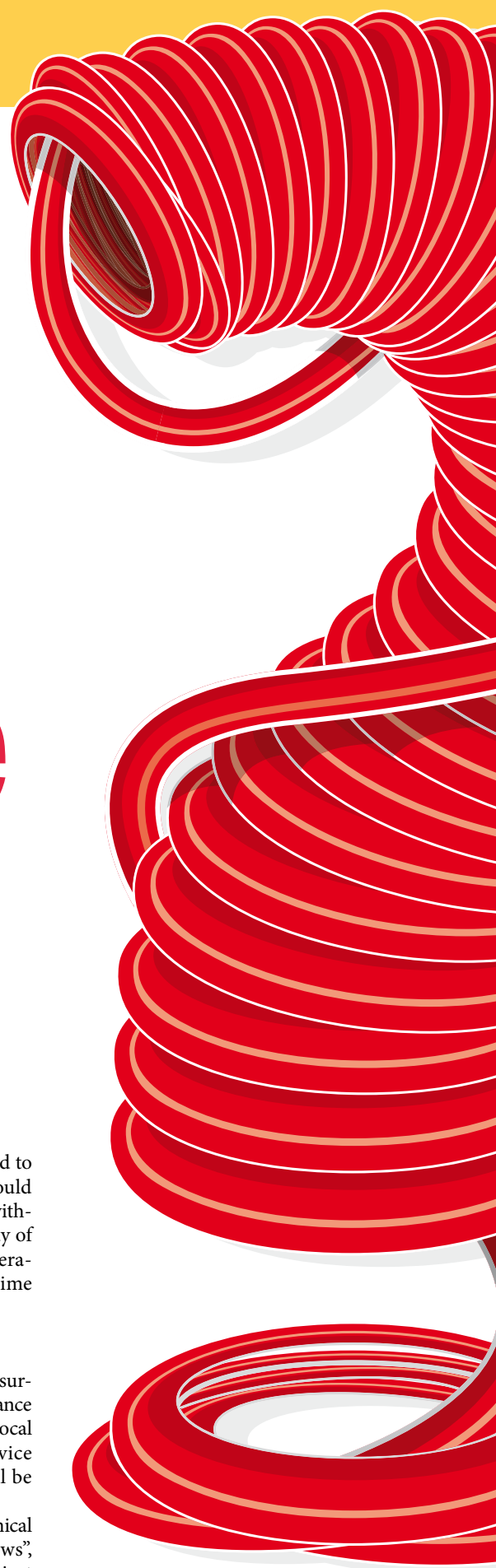
Empty assurances

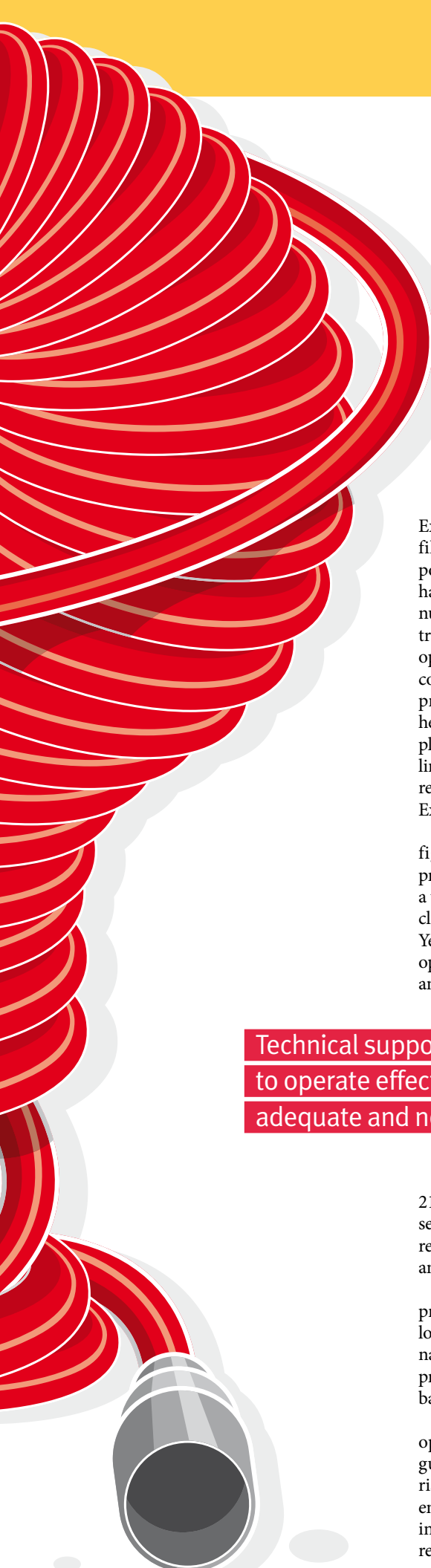
The minister did, however, give the reassurance that recently issued operational guidance was available on the Communities and Local Government website. But any fire service manager visiting the website today will be disappointed.

Under a section entitled, “Online Technical and Operational Guidance: project news”, the website states that “Currently, a project is underway to review all existing guidance relating to operational, technical and professional matters that has been issued since 1947.

“This will mean that simplified, easily-accessible forms of guidance will be available

→ FBU annual conference in May unanimously agreed an emergency resolution that expressed concern at the rising number of on-duty firefighter deaths and instructed the Executive Council to initiate research on the subject. That work is now well under way and a report is expected in October.





on this website in due course.” It contains not a single piece of operational guidance.

Concerns about the lack of technical operational direction and support from central government do not end here. For more than two years, discussions and consultations have taken place around The Centre of Excellence, a national body that could have filled the current vacuum in research and policy development that the Union believes has led to weaknesses in the fire service in a number of key risk-critical areas such as the training of personnel, risk and task analysis, operational policy and procedure and data collation and analysis. The centre could have provided a much needed central ‘brain’ to help ensure local integrated risk management plans properly protected the public and front-line fire crews. But thanks in large part to a reluctance to fund it centrally, The Centre of Excellence was stillborn.

General Secretary Matt Wrack said firefighters faced considerable risks as they protected the public 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and new threats such as terrorism and climate change have heightened those risks. Yet the technical support fire services need to operate effectively and safely is not adequate and not readily available.

Technical support fire services need to operate effectively and safely is not adequate and not readily available

“This is no way to run a fire service of the 21st century. If the Government wants a fire service capable of providing genuine national resilience it needs to get a grip on this issue, and it needs to do it quickly.

“Planning and policy must be based on professional firefighting expertise not ideological fancy and penny pinching. We need a national fire and rescue service body that will provide the joined-up thinking and direction badly needed in today’s fire service.

“This body would be responsible for developing and agreeing safety critical national guidance that will ensure local integrated risk management plans provide an effective emergency response while taking adequately into account firefighter safety, training and resource needs.”

LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER

The Union is organising a rally and a lobby of parliament in Westminster on 12 November and urging every fire station and fire service workplace to send a rep and lobby their MP.

Raise with your MP:

LEARNING THE LESSONS

We will call for a national Fire and Rescue Service body – responsible for ensuring that the findings and recommendations from fatal or other serious incidents are considered and implemented across the UK.

INVEST IN SAFETY

This body should be tasked with keeping adequate records of incidents involving the deaths and serious injury of firefighters at national level. It should also be responsible for developing and agreeing safety critical national guidance based on the lessons learned from deaths and from other serious incidents.

INVEST IN TRAINING

We will press for a greater balance to be restored between community safety initiatives and operational intervention. There is a need for a greater emphasis on training for operational emergency response and the technical knowledge that is required to support such response.

IMPROVE EMERGENCY PLANNING

We are concerned that local Fire Service Risk Management Plans (IRMP) do not adequately take into account firefighter safety, training and resource needs. We will call for improvement in the guidance given to fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) when developing IRMPs.

INVEST IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The FBU fully supports the drive to prevent fires through education and community engagement. However, we are concerned that among some policy makers there has been a campaign to undermine and denigrate the importance of Emergency Intervention. The truth is that Emergency Intervention (responding to fires and other emergencies) remains at the heart of our Service. Failing to take account of this fact threatens to further endanger the safety of firefighters. We will insist that this is recognised and taken into account in all policy development at a national and local level.

You should



The minister does not agree that FireControl has 'gone to the dogs' – but the Union has learned that costs have risen yet again

Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda does not agree that FireControl project has "gone to the dogs" and wrote to *Firefighter* to tell us this. In the hope of getting all the facts about regional controls out in the open, we have published his response.

We should be grateful for a £360 million investment in regional controls, he seems to be saying. And, of course, if that huge amount was actually being spent on improving frontline services he would have a point.

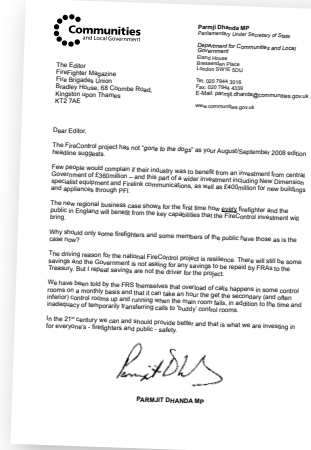
But the fact is that not a single firefighter nor member of the public will benefit from FireControl. Worse, there is a very real risk of cuts to frontline services to pay for the project. And hundreds of fire control operators – critical to the top-performing public service that the fire service is – are going to be thrown onto the scrap heap in the process and replaced by untried and untested technology.

Moreover, regional controls are not going to cost £360 million, even though that is more than three times the original £100 million the Government said they would cost.

Money wasted

We have learned that the plans to close 46 emergency fire control rooms in England and move to nine regional centres has already seen £869 million spent on the project or clearly earmarked to be spent by government. The £869 million includes £278 million on management consultants, regional project directors, "change co-ordinators", project assurance directors, PR staff, civil servants and agency staff. Only £190 million, less than a quarter of the costs identified, will be spent on the actual technology. The costs also include nearly £400 million for renting new buildings. The Union has identified the £869 million of costs from the detail of a series of parliamentary answers and department for Communities and Local Government circulars. But the Union expects the much-delayed national business case will show project costs in excess of £1.5 billion.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said:



"The public and the fire service are being taken to the cleaners. There is an army of management consultants, contractors and employment agencies swimming in taxpayer's cash. 'We're short of fire-fighters in many brigades and in desperate need of more safety-critical equipment and training. Even a fraction of this money would make an enormous

difference in every fire brigade. 'Instead, it is being wasted on management consultants, regional project directors, change co-ordinators, project assurance directors, PR and human resource directors. No one ever dialled 999 and asked for any of those.

"There must be an urgent independent review into what is going on with this project before it is too late. The Government thinks the project is going along splendidly, when almost everyone else in the fire service knows it is already a disaster."

But as we've said many times before, it's not just us saying this. Nicky Attenborough, the Conservative leader of Bedford Borough Council, angry about the proposed closure of Kempston control centre and the axing of 30 emergency fire control staff, told his local press in September:

"The Labour government's expensive plans for the regionalisation of our fire control services are mired in chaos. The shambolic project is already delayed, it's £400 million over budget and we now are told that costs are likely to rise even more.

Frontline cuts

"While the Government has pledged to provide 'resilience' payments to cover the increased costs for many of the regional control centres, these payments are only for three years, and I fear that our local fire service will be left with no choice but to make cuts or increase the fire levy on council tax to foot the soaring bill. 'I believe the fire control room in Kempston is vital to the safety of local residents, Conservatives will oppose this expensive and unnecessary mess every step of the way. 'Labour ministers should follow the example of Scotland and dump these cuts to local fire services."

Dear Editor,

The FireControl project has not "*gone to the dogs*" as your August/September 2008 edition headline suggests.

Few people would complain if their industry was to benefit from an investment from central Government of £360million – and this part of a wider investment including New Dimension specialist equipment and Firelink communications, as well as £400million for new buildings and appliances through PFI.

The new regional business case shows for the first time how every firefighter and the public in England will benefit from the key capabilities that the FireControl investment will bring.

Why should only some firefighters and some members of the public have those as is the case now?

The driving reason for the national FireControl project is resilience. There will still be some savings and the Government is not asking for any savings to be repaid by FRAs to the Treasury. But I repeat savings are not the driver for the project.

We have been told by the FRS themselves that overload of calls happens in some control rooms on a monthly basis and that it can take an hour to get the secondary (and often inferior) control rooms up and running when the main room fails, in addition to the time and inadequacy of temporarily transferring calls to 'buddy' control rooms.

In the 21st century we can and should provide better and that is what we are investing in for everyone's – firefighters and public – safety.

be grateful!

Check your sums!

The union's research shows:

+£92.2 million has been ear-marked for regions and fire brigades to pay largely for additional staffing and associated projects costs between 2008 and 2011 including for regional directors, press officers, "change co-ordinators", project assurance staff and for "redundancies, relocation and redeployments".

+£55.4 million going to management consultants, well above the last estimate of £36 million. By the end of June of this year, £38,571,512 had already been paid with a further £16.9 million more ear-marked for consultants by the end of the project.


+£27, 885,926 was paid between 2005 and 2008 to fire brigades and regions to cover the additional staffing and associated costs of setting up the project.

+£22 million had been paid by the Department until the end of June 2008 on those working on the project at national level including civil servants, contractors and agency staff (in addition to consultants).

In addition there are rental costs for the new 9 regional control centre buildings of at least £342 million, which excludes London. FBU researchers conservatively estimate the lease for a new regional control centre in London will cost £60 million, pushing the rental cost of the buildings for the new national network above £400 million.

The IT system costs regularly quoted in Parliamentary Answers are only £190 million. The union believes that cost is actually £213 million for the first 8 years alone.

Source: Answers to parliamentary questions
15 July 2008, 2 June 2008, 20 March 2008,
13 March 2007, 27 October 2005.



FIRE
CONTROL
~~= £100 MILLION~~
~~= £360 MILLION~~
= £869 MILLION

'HER DEATH HAS LEFT A MASSIVE VOID'

Kathy Thompson had always been 'fit as a lock'. Then, in her late 40s, she was diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma. The likeliest cause? Handling the civilian fire kit of her firefighter husband, Alan



Life seems sweet for the smiling, smartly dressed couple in the picture printed here. Kathy and Alan Thompson, themselves happily married for 37 years, are seen at their youngest daughter Angela's wedding.

Kathy, mother of the bride, looks radiant, confident and brimming with life. But on May 29 2007, five months to the day from when this shot was taken, Kathy died in Teesside Hospice, surrounded by her close family – husband Alan, a former firefighter, and daughters Nicola and Angela.

At just 54, Kathy had finally succumbed to the ravages of malignant mesothelioma, diagnosed more than five years earlier.

Alan saw Kathy undergo a barrage of treatments – chemotherapy, injections, x-rays and a promising new drug which failed to deliver hoped-for benefits. But all treatment was stopped in early 2007. As she struggled for breath, strong pain-killers and oxygen helped ease Kathy's final months.

This cruel disease is caused by exposure to asbestos fibres. Asbestos related deaths among workers are well chronicled, often occurring decades after exposure. But Kathy had worked in offices, not factories or crumbling public buildings. Her diagnosis, confirmed by chest x-rays, initially left doctors baffled. How could a fit woman who had never been exposed to asbestos at work contract the deadly disease?

The truth is truly shocking. It's now accepted that Kathy Thompson is most likely to have contracted the mesothelioma through secondary exposure to the deadly dust in her own kitchen back in the seventies. To explain: Alan worked as a firefighter at Middlesbrough station and Kathy regularly shook out his civilian "fire kit" before washing the clothes in an old-style twin tub.

Alan's clothes peg in the fire station basement was close to a frayed asbestos lagged pipe. He reported the damage and the basement was closed for a while.

How could a fit woman who had never been exposed to asbestos at work contract the deadly disease?



It is now 17 months since Kathy's death but for Alan Thompson, an amiable, mild-mannered man, the grief is still raw. Before her illness took hold, Kathy had cooked, cleaned and looked after the house. Alan hasn't let things slip – the home they shared outside Middlesbrough is neat and well-kept. But, as he said after the inquest, "her death has left a massive void".

Sitting in the living room, across from the sofa where Kathy breathed oxygen from a mobile unit in her last months, Alan recalls how the hospital consultant broke the devastating news to his wife, when x-rays revealed small tumours in her lungs. "He said: 'You've got mesothelioma.' We said 'What can be done?' And he said: 'This is what you are going to do. You've got to take your life six months at a time from now on.'"

"Kathy nearly dropped through the floor. We had said what about treatment and he said go home and live your life. It was a bombshell."

Alan has had to adapt to life without Kathy. He's taught himself how to cook and sometimes takes off to the hills on his mountain bike, a longstanding hobby. And sometimes he mulls over the past. "If Kathy had been working with asbestos herself it would have been slightly easier to accept," he says, cradling a mug of tea. "When I think back now to how the fire brigade were supposed to be safety conscious and there's us swilling around in asbestos dust ... I used to hang my kit in the basement right below where part of the pipe lagging was damaged. I knew it needed sorting, but never thought just how dangerous it would prove to be."

Kathy, in her late forties when diagnosed, had always been "fit as a lock", says Alan. She jogged, ran half marathons and even took up Ceroc dancing – a fusion of jive and salsa – after diagnosis. She was close to her daughters, both graduate teachers who now live locally and visit Alan often.

Towards the end of her life, Kathy spent two weeks in Teesside Hospice. She received humane and attentive care, but wanted to go back home. She was driven up to the front door, helped out of the car by her daughters, and sighed delightedly "It's good to be home," as she took in the freshly decorated hall and newly installed stair lift. But she deteriorated rapidly and was back in the hospice after four days. She died two days later.

Alan Thompson is a thoughtful, private man who is not a born campaigner. He agreed to be interviewed to raise awareness of the dangers of asbestos, to celebrate Kathy's life and to express gratitude to the Union for providing timely specialist help.

Thompsons are currently dealing with nine asbestos-related cases for FBU members. Kathy Thompson's case was the first traced to secondary exposure that they have handled. Ian McFall, head of asbestos policy at Thompsons solicitors, says it is predicted that 90,000 people in the UK will die from mesothelioma because of previous exposure to asbestos. "It is unacceptable that any firefighter should be exposed to asbestos during the course of their duties. There is well-documented, clear cut evidence, known about for over 40 years, that even low levels of asbestos exposure can be sufficient to cause fatal illness."

After what his family has suffered, Alan Thompson is keen to alert others to the dangers. "It's important to spread the word. If you think either yourself or someone else has been affected by exposure to asbestos, use the offices of the Union to the maximum. Be vigilant. If something looks dodgy, alert the Union and people in charge. It could save lives."

→ The FBU runs an asbestos register – a record of members who believe they were exposed to the lethal dust while working for the fire service. Enter your details now. Visit: www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/resources/forms/asbestos_survey.php or phone 0808 100 6061.

'If you think someone has been exposed to asbestos, use the offices of the Union to the maximum'

The coroner at Kathy's inquest, recorded death by misadventure and concluded she could well have contracted the disease after coming into contact with her husband's civilian work clothes. No other contact could be traced.

In 2002, in a case supported by the FBU, the fire service had reached the same conclusion – and paid damages to Kathy after her disease was diagnosed. The money helped make her more comfortable as the disease progressed, but it could never compensate for her needless suffering. Or lengthen her life.

Cause and effect can be notoriously hard to establish in asbestos-related cases. But Alan's diligence in reporting the damaged lagging, backed up by testimony from fellow firefighters, and fire service internal records, enabled Thompsons solicitors to build a robust case. They could show how secondary exposure to asbestos through deadly fibres contained on Alan's civilian fire clothes were the likeliest cause of Kathy's subsequent illness.

WHAT DOES AN FBU HEALTH AND SAFETY REP DO?

While firefighters look out for other people's safety, back at the station FBU safety reps are helping ensure colleagues are not needlessly exposed to risks and hazards

Firefighters spend their lives looking out for other people's safety. So, it's good to know that back at the station, union safety reps are helping ensure colleagues are not needlessly exposed to risks and hazards. Union health and safety reps across public and private sector workplaces play a vital role in checking that everything is in order – and trying to get it sorted if not.

The costs to individuals can be very high indeed if health and safety is compromised – as the tragic deaths of firefighters caused by exposure to asbestos dust proved. In last year's floods, some firefighters found themselves wading through filthy contaminated water in inadequate kits, prompting the union to campaign for more resources to safeguard member's health and welfare.

The union rep is an important player in watching out for the health and safety of firefighters and other FBU members at fire service workplaces across the UK.

Gary Murphy, a Strathclyde firefighter for 17 years, wears two safety rep hats. Nearly three years ago he took over as branch safety rep at Coatbridge, where he's worked on Blue Watch for 14 years. For the past nine months he has also held the post of divisional rep, covering eight stations.

Gary's interest in workplace safety has grown over the years – so when the Coatbridge safety rep was coming up for retirement, he relished the challenge of taking on the role. The station is eight miles east of Glasgow, and covers the towns of Airdrie and Coatbridge and their rural hinterland.

When arriving at a fire scene, the officer in charge will decide whether to send people inside or fight the fire from outside the building. Back at the station, the risks

may seem less dramatic – but a slippery floor can cause a crew member to end up with a broken arm, ankle or worse, depleting the team while the victim recuperates.

Workplace vigilance helps the station run more smoothly – and looking after the health and safety of yourself and colleagues is not an optional extra, but a crucial part of the job.

This is hard-wired into most firefighters – as Gary says, every new recruit learns why health and safety in the workplace matters as part of training and “learns what their obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act are”. It's not just potential “slips and trips” that health and safety reps are on the look out for, although these are the single most common cause of major injury in UK workplaces. There is a whole raft of regulations – covering everything from use of visual display units to internal lighting and ventilation – designed to ensure the workplace is safe and employees' health is not endangered.

Gary wouldn't claim to know every clause of the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act and subsequent amendments –

Gary Murphy inspecting the premises at his branch, Coatbridge, and, below, with the FBU's new branch health and safety pack



PHOTOS: ALAN WYLIE





but he knows how to get up to speed sharpish if he needs to. The FBU website has proved useful – he logs on to see what's new. And he welcomes the new health and safety pack for reps which has just been launched and is available through your brigade safety rep. "We carry out a station inspection with the station managers at least once a year and this will certainly help. There are station inspection health and safety check lists and log sheets and lots of guidance notes to help. The new format is accessible and easy to follow. It's brought everything up to date."

Gary would encourage those with an interest in the area and who would like to get more involved to put themselves forward as safety reps. "You won't be left to cope alone. The Union provides the help, training and resources you need to do the job properly. And if you're not quite sure how to deal with something at the station, there are always other reps in the area, and people in the

'As a health and safety rep you are not left to cope alone. the Union provides the help, training and resources you need to do the job properly'

region and at head office if needed. You'll get the support you need."

Gary speaks from experience. His station managers have sent him on an Institute of Occupational Health course. And through the union he has completed stage one of the TUC-accredited health and safety course at college in Glasgow. This covered the basics, including how to set up a health and safety committee and the rights of union reps. He's now going on to complete stage two – and hopes to gain his TUC diploma in health and safety after that. He has no regrets about getting involved. The more you get into it, the more interesting it becomes. Colleagues raise concerns and tip me off about things sometimes. If there is a problem, it's in everybody's interest to get it fixed."

Station reps carry out inspections alongside station managers – and if there is a difference of view, reps can always raise it with officials higher up in the union. The union perspective makes sure that there's an element of independent scrutiny. But, says Gary, in his experience so far ensuring the health, safety and welfare of station staff has been carried out in a spirit of partnership between the union and management.

→ The new FBU health and safety pack is available through your brigade safety rep

Not just bad snoring

Many sufferers are unaware that their breathing is interrupted during the night ...

SLEEP APNOEA

Sleep apnoea is a medical condition which causes the sufferer to experience interrupted sleep patterns and disturbed breathing. Often dismissed as simply a case of bad snoring, the affliction can have serious consequences for the sleeping habits of the individual and their partner which, in turn, can affect their ability to function normally throughout the day.

Sleep apnoea occurs when your throat is narrowed during sleep, usually as a result of the muscles relaxing dramatically, enlarged

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- ◆ Very loud snoring
- ◆ Laboured, interrupted breathing patterns
- ◆ Extreme sense of daytime fatigue
- ◆ Poor memory and concentration
- ◆ Irritability and short temper

tonsils or obstructed nasal breathing passages. During the night, you are continually woken in order for your body to reverse the obstruction to your upper airways. This leads to an overwhelming sense of fatigue the following day, which can interfere with even the most fundamental activities such as talking or

eating. This extreme feeling of tiredness can lead to poor work performance and interfere with driving, placing the sufferer in life-threatening situations.

How common is the condition?

In the UK, it is estimated that around 3.5% of men and 1.5% of women suffer from sleep apnoea, with the condition most prevalent in those aged over 40. While being overweight will increase the likelihood of a person having difficulty breathing during their sleep, the condition affects many people who may otherwise be considered perfectly healthy.

How is the condition diagnosed?

The majority of sleep apnoea sufferers will be unaware that their breathing is interrupted during the night so the condition remains vastly under-diagnosed.

The condition is often identified by the individual's partner who seeks medical treatment on their behalf, after years of troubled sleep. In order to ascertain the cause for the sufferer's chronic snoring and night time breathing problems, a medical practitioner will often refer them to undertake a sleep study, either in a clinic or at home. These studies measure the patterns in an individual's breathing habits during sleep and record any 'episodes' of interrupted breathing which would indicate a propensity for sleep apnoea.

What treatments are available?

Mild cases of sleep apnoea can often be alleviated through simple lifestyle changes, such as losing weight, limiting alcohol intake, quitting smoking and sleeping on one's side.

Severe cases may require the use of a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) mask, which is worn during sleep to provide a flow of pressurised air to open the breathing passages. Connected to a quiet pump beside the bed, CPAP therapy can lead to dramatic results for the sufferer. Recent developments have led to the masks becoming increasingly less cumbersome and are now suitable to take travelling, meaning that the condition can now be managed with relative ease and comfort.

➔ For further information on sleep apnoea please visit: www.osauk.org/osauk/

If you then suspect that you may be suffering from sleep apnoea, please contact the Centre for Healthy Sleep on 01235 862 997.

SHUTTERSTOCK



Imposing a duty system

Q Senior managers in my brigade are intent on introducing a new duty system that requires a change to the contract of employment. Can they impose this or do they first have to have the express agreement of the FBU?

A If the brigade introduces a new duty system without agreement under the Grey Book procedure, and without the facility to do so under your contract of employment, this should be treated as a breach of contract. If you are dissatisfied with the change, it is important that you and other members affected work with the FBU to dispute this immediately. If you simply work under the new duty system then you will be deemed to have agreed the changes. You could make a formal complaint under the grievance procedure. If the matter remains unresolved then legal assistance can be requested with a view to taking the case further by making a breach of contract claim in the employment tribunal or civil courts.

FBU guidance is that members should apply for legal assistance once six weeks have expired from the dispute arising – in this case the imposition of the duty system – and only apply before then if the grievance procedure is exhausted within that six-week period. This is because there is a three-month deadline for employment tribunal claims.

Although it is important to take these steps to protect your position, legal proceedings cannot, in the long term, resolve

a dispute about duty systems. It is likely that other members will be affected and realistically the matter will best be resolved by FBU negotiating on behalf of all members involved.

If you consider the changes to be a breach of contract so serious that the contract is fundamentally undermined and you feel you have no choice

but to resign, then you may be able to claim constructive unfair dismissal in the employment tribunal, even though you brought your employment to an end. However, this is rarely advisable and it is important that you contact the FBU and also apply for legal assistance from FBU before considering such action.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

Lump sum commutation

Q Can I take my lump sum commutation and continue working in my current job?

A It is at the discretion of the employing fire and rescue authority to decide whether you may retire, come back into the same job and take the lump sum. Should you wish to, and this wish is granted by the fire authority, the knock-on effect is that there will be abatement of the pension. You will not receive the annual pensionable entitlement plus the salary, just the salary for the role.

It must be noted that the commutation can only be paid on retirement, so there will have to be a break in service.

You will, however, only be eligible to join the NFPS as the FPS was closed to new entrants from April 2006.

Pension information

Q I recently joined the NFPS as a retained duty system firefighter. I am paying contributions to the scheme but my fire authority has provided me with no other information. Should they provide me with details?

A Yes. The authority is legally obliged to provide you with an outline of the scheme. This is invariably provided in the form of a booklet and should have been given to you when you joined the service, without you having to ask. If you need to know what the scheme provides right now, a standard booklet can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/fire/working/firefighterpensions/newfirefighterspension/formsguidance/

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

'I love painting and I love firefighting'

Vicky Stonebridge combines painting, animation and illustrating comics with a 120-hours-a-week commitment to retained firefighting in the Scottish Highlands

Artist and craft worker Vicky Stonebridge is a retained firefighter in the Scottish highlands. And a series of paintings aimed at capturing the working lives of rural fire crews is among her many works in progress. This summer, Vicky taught Highland children how to draw comics, pitched up at fairs with her art work and still managed to be on call over 120 hours a week to help provide fire cover for her home village of Lochcarron and isolated settlements beyond.

When not out on the road or fighting fires and other emergencies, Vicky is likely to be at home working on her art. She used to run her own pottery studio

outside the village, but now making pots is on hold and the spare bedroom of the family home has become a creative hub for her one woman business, Balnacra Arts.

Vicky paints in oils, acrylics and water colours, draws comic strips and has recently got into making short animated films, with the help of downloaded "freeware" and a competition win to get the finished film screened at the 2006 Inverness Film Festival.

Animation is very labour intensive. "It takes 25 frames or drawings to make just one second's film," says Vicky. So far she has created "The Giant of Loch Lochcarron" and a fragment/ preview – "Who's Afraid?", which "dwells on quite dark themes like friendship and betrayal." She hopes to complete the story, and may even turn it into a comic format – another absorbing interest which she shares with her partner, who writes stories and co-edits five independent comics. The two worked together on Wild West Wendy, and they may self-publish future editions.

The internet has fuelled a boom in small independent comics and has enabled enthusiasts, artists and writers to link up and collaborate on line to put together a strip. "It's a team effort but you sometimes don't ever meet your collaborators," says Vicky who relishes working in different media and formats.

Vicky, 42, has raised three children in the area who are now aged between 15 and 22. They moved down to within the village in 2002 – which coincided with a fire service recruitment drive. "There weren't any women crew members and one of the guys suggested I go for it. It never occurred to me to apply because I thought it was a boys' thing and was terrified of fire and confined places as a child. But not any more, and I took to it like a duck to water.

"I'm really glad I joined and can work around my fire commitments. Even before the latest fuel rises the cost of travelling made it very expensive to commute long distances so I thought I'd be better off going freelance from home."

Though not born in Scotland – her parents moved up from England in the

'Firefighting pictures can sometimes be over romanticised and Victorian. I want to paint what I see'





VICKY STONEBRIDGE

Vicky Stonebridge is a firefighter in Lochcarron in the North West Highlands. When she isn't fighting fires, she's likely to be at home working on her art.

seventies oil boom – Vicky regards herself as very much a local.

She has an abiding interest in Celtic and Pictish art, and was astonished to read an article in the National Geographic magazine 11 years ago of the discovery of a mummified tattooed woman, preserved in the Siberian permafrost, Scythian body-art still discernable after thousands of years. Arms, legs and hands are emblazoned with animal patterns – which, Vicky thinks, seem to have much in common with Celtic art. She'd like to travel to Siberia one day "to make the link and solve the mystery".

The firefighting paintings started with "Damping Down" – which shows two crew members doing just that – and the hope is it could eventually lead to an exhibition chronicling the working life of rural firefighters. A gallery is interested in showing them next spring.

"I love painting and I love firefighting – so why not start putting them together?" says Vicky, who has already completed another painting of crew members using cutting tools. More works are in the pipeline, and they won't be sentimental.

"Firefighting pictures can sometimes be over roman-

'There weren't any women crew members and one of the guys suggested I go for it'

ticised and Victorian," she says. "I want to paint what I see – the grit, the grime, the reality – as well as try to capture the camaraderie and spirit which helps make the job so rewarding."

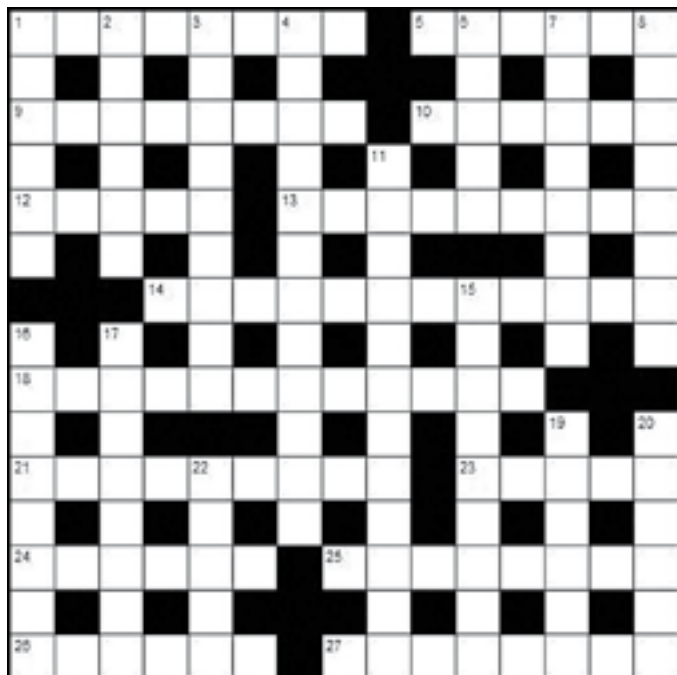
Retained firefighters in remote rural areas, are "wedded and grounded" in the job, says Vicky, who, like a good few of her colleagues in the Highlands, combines her commitment to being on call over 120 hours a week with two or more other jobs. "That's the way in the Highlands, and I expect it's the same for other remote areas."

Vicky has embraced the internet – she has a website, sells her work on line and surfers can browse through comic strips, drawings and paintings and see and hear her two short animations at the click of a mouse.

So what next apart from the firefighter sequence? Vicky has some work in galleries and would also like to get into book illustration and carry on drawing comic strips and exploring animation. Oh, and she would love to get back to making pots sometime, when she can get access to a kiln. Or as Vicky puts it: "I'll stick with my art and see where it takes me."

→ www.balnacra.com/www.lochcarronfirebrigade.co.uk/

Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Player (8)
- 5 Greek island (6)
- 9 Systematic investigation into subject (8)
- 10 Deprive of nutrition (6)
- 12 Turnips in Scotland (5)
- 13 Host city for 2009 TUC Congress (9)
- 14 Tonsorial artists (12)
- 18 Opposite of diluted (12)
- 21 Mixture of dried petals etc used to perfume room, wardrobe etc (3-6)
- 23 Bird, fly—or heavy plant! (5)
- 24 Cricket or football team (6)
- 25 Attentive to duty or task (8)
- 26 Emphatic cause of sick-leave? (6)
- 27 Hosted 2008 TUC Congress (8)

DOWN

- 1 Harbour for yachts etc (6)
- 2 27's county (6)
- 3 Fellow student (9)
- 4 Go-faster pedals (12)
- 6 Go in (5)
- 7 Acquired temporarily (8)
- 8 Such grapes won't give you the pip! (8)
- 11 Too friendly (12)
- 15 Drawing, outlining (9)
- 16 Sinks (8)
- 17 Woollies, jumpers etc (8)
- 19 Mum or dad (6)
- 20 17th Century physicist formerly found on £1 note (6)
- 22 Does as directed (5)



Solution to the August/September crossword



Prize Quiz

Win the new updated iPod Nano

Just answer the questions below.
The theme is art and literature

1. Which Pulitzer prize winning book, written by Alice Walker and set in the American deep south, was made into a film starring Whoopi Goldberg?

2. For what book character is A A Milne most famous?

3. Who wrote *The Canterbury Tales*?

4. Name the author of *War And Peace*.

5. The *Constant Gardener* was written by which former MI6 agent?

6. In Charles Dickens *A Tale Of Two Cities* what are the two cities?



HOW TO ENTER

To win the new updated iPod Nano please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 31 October 2008 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (October 2008) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

Answers to the August/September prize quiz

1. Toni Blair
2. President George W Bush
3. Terry Field
4. The Russian Press
5. David Cameron
6. Michael Howard

Winner of the July prize quiz was P Silk of Leicester

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

In complete control



On Planet DCLOG things just keep getting better. Regional fire control cutover is right on course for October 2009 and

FireControl is going along splendidly too.

The costs are falling too and a special project team of highly skilled accountants is hard at work trying to spin its way out of impending financial disaster. But they are not happy bunnies.

No one wants to tell the ministers that the October 2009 cutover date is looking shaky. Those a bit more in the know are pencilling in another six to 12 months delay.

Problems? Don't get them started, they've bitten their nails down to the quick and go around muttering "screen freezing" and "wiring loom".

The more cynical say delay until July 2010. After the next general election.

Data stick



FireControl now lurches gracefully towards gathering up all the data held by fire services and transferring it

to the central databases (three regional controls will act as data centres). Things like door codes, alarm systems, access to buildings, museums, art galleries, royal palaces, where all the nasty chemicals are.

No-one would be interested in getting hold of any of that, don't be silly. And how are they going to transfer this data?

Faster than you can say "lost data stick" the instruction remains as put it on a disc and pop it in the post. DCLOG's magic fairies look after it all.

PA Lost it



PA Consulting – yes the one that the Government paid £25,371,774 as of June 2008 for their efforts on

FireControl project – was the culprit for the latest "lost data" episode. Among a raft of lucrative Government contracts was a research project on tracking offenders through the criminal justice system. That was until un-encrypted details of 10,000



prolific offenders as well as names, dates of births and some prison release and home detention curfew dates of all 84,000 prisoners in England and Wales, plus 33,000 records from the police national computer, went astray.

A Home Office report into the incident said the memory stick containing the data was most likely stolen by an opportunistic thief **"when it was left in an insecure location in PA Consulting Group's offices"** (an unlocked drawer).

The Government has now cancelled PA Consulting's three-year contract worth £1.5 million and said that six other contracts with the Home Office worth £8.5 million were under review (not the controversial ID cards contract though). But Keith Vaz, Labour MP and chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, is of the view that the "firm obviously has some serious procedural failures" and that it should not hold any contracts for any Government work.

Yes, at Planet DCLOG things just keep getting better.

Thunderbirds



The Department is developing a sense of humour. A few months ago their press releases had

minister Parmjit Dhandha announcing "Thunderbirds" style pods to the fire service. Now he's delivering "ET come home" communications systems.

Betting is on Star Wars or Star Trek next:

Beam me up Scotty, my phaser has stopped working.



✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbi.org.uk

25-year badges



Andy Akehurst (r), Red Watch, Reigate Fire station, Surrey, receives his 25-year badge from Tim Wellman, Station Rep



Andy Stringer (l) from Poplar White Watch, London receives his 25-year badge from Eastern Officers Secretary Steve White



Barry Richards (r) Red Watch, Bury St Edmunds Suffolk receives his 25-year badge from Branch Rep Matt Hassey



Bob Bridger (l) Staveley, Derbyshire receives his 25-year badge from Branch Rep Dave Simonds



Dave Walsh (r), Green Watch, Preston, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from Kevin Deacon, Branch Secretary



Gary Oddie (r), Green Watch, Preston, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from Kevin Deacon, Branch Secretary



Chris Brown (r) of Sheffield Central, Red Watch, receives his 25-year badge from Cath Toovey, Branch Secretary



Dave Rose (r) Gravesham Fire Safety Office (Kent) receives his 25-year badge from Region 11 EC Member Ernie Thornton



Mick Shears (r) Fallings Park receives his 25-year badge from Chris Downes, West Mids Membership Secretary

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk
Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Jim Malone (far left) Tayside FBU Brigade Secretary presents 25 year badges to (back row) Ali McDonald, Jim Smith, John Mowatt; (middle Row) Ewan Miles, Ronnie Massie, Charlie Kidd; (front row) Alan Brown, Kenny Higgins, Eddie Lynch

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS